

Stevens (A. H.)

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**FAMILIAR
INSTRUCTIONS**

FOR THE

PREVENTION

OF

CHOLERA,

Prepared for a Family about leaving the City.

NEW YORK, 5th JULY, 1832.

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1832.

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Alex. H. Stevens

The following instructions not originally prepared for publication, have been printed for my own convenience and that of those who have requested my opinions on the subject. I shall be gratified if they should prove of more general utility.

ALEX. H. STEVENS.

Chamber Street {
July 5. 1832. }

To _____,

New York, 1st July, 1832.

DEAR SIR,

IN compliance with your request, made to me this morning, that I should furnish you with some plain directions for the management of yourselves and family, with respect to the prevention and treatment of Cholera I will endeavour to state my opinions on this subject, as briefly as possible. In the first place, as to the question of removal from the City. You have already decided by my advice to remove to a dry inland situation. It may be expected that if this pestilence prevail at all in such situations, it will be in a mitigated form; situations on the sea shore, will perhaps with reason be preferred by some to whom a marine atmosphere is otherwise suited. There would appear to be negative evidence that this disease has not prevailed in insulated farm houses.

It seems to be admitted by those who have most extensively observed the Spasmodic Cholera, that it is always or generally, preceded by a furred state of the tongue and a deranged condition of the bowels,—usually a slight looseness, unattended with pain, the discharges being at first dark brown, and afterwards gradually becoming of a lighter colour; that this state continues during several days before the peculiar symptoms of Cholera appear. It is sometimes so slight, as not particularly to attract the patients attention, and at other times is more severe, and

impresses upon his countenance, the haggard aspect of the disease. When properly treated, the Cholera is usually arrested, in this its forming or premonitory state. Such being a summary of the best information, upon this particular point, I am led to conclude, that the prevention of Cholera, is to be effected, by preventing and removing, disorder of the bowels. By avoiding all those causes, which are apt to derange the bowels, at this season of the year in our climate. These causes are numerous. Drugs given as preventives, sudden change of diet; all green, watery fruits and vegetables, especially uncooked, fresh bread, shell fish, (except hard clams,) and in general, whatever is found usually to disagree with the individual and with others; salted meats and smoked meats, and smoked fish; improper drinks—acid and all other wines and cider,—cold drinks unless in very small quantities,—too much drink of any kind,—a change of water or drinks—over-heating the body, or agitating the mind,—taking food or drink, when agitated or heated,—or getting heated or agitated, soon after taking food.—Exposure to the night air if damp, sleeping with a window open, or if this be unavoidable, in a draft; want of sufficient covering, especially over the abdomen, to prevent injury from sudden changes of temperature, either in the night while sleeping, or after perspiring freely in the day time. I recommend to you to go to bed cool, not to sit up late, and to rise early.

Those who are feeble, will do well to repose in the heat of day. For yourself and Lady, the food I think most proper is, rice, barley, in all their simple preparations. All farinaceous vegetables except beans and peas and bread recently baked,

eggs, plain boiled, roasted or boiled meats. And broths of of these and farinacious vegetables, seasoned enough for the taste, but not enough to excite thirst such as may not be easily controlled, without taking drink between meals. For your children, the same course is also best. The preparations of of barley, rice, sago, arrow root and milk, with little or no animal food should be given. If these turn sour upon the stomach, substitute plain animal broth, or mix the two.

I urge upon you early attention to any derangement of the bowels, either from a neglect of these precautions or other causes. The season of the year in which we are threatened with the malignant Cholera, is that also, in which our own disease, by that name, and slight diarrheas always prevail in this community, to a very considerable extent. By preventing common Cholera, we may expect to escape the malignant.

Are we to conclude, that common Cholera and Diarrhea, are the early symptoms of the Malignant Cholera, many believe so ; but while I would advise no one, to be so apprehensive of this result, in his own case, as to consider it probable, it will be the part of every prudent person, to pay early attention, to every slight derangement of his bowels. Abstinence will often cure it ; if that does not do it speedily, it will at any rate prepare the system for the kind operation of Medicine.

If no physician of intelligence can be readily consulted, you can hardly go wrong, by administering a dose of castor oil, or of rhubarb and magnesia with mint water, or in bilious habits six grains Calomel if to an adult, followed by

salts in divided doses; and after any of these remedies, a few drops of laudanum; and keeping the patient in a perspiration with warm catmint or other herb teas, and for a day or two, a diet of toast water or chicken tea.

But if the tongue be clean and the feelings comfortable, costiveness may be disregarded; it is of great importance to regulate the bowels if possible without medicine; especially in those of delicate constitution and those who are not likely to take sufficient precautions to avoid the exciting causes of disease after medicine has been taken. The taking of medicine should be considered as a choice of evils,—a deranged state of the digestive organs often follows the use of medicine, especially the stronger kinds; if the patient be not kept quiet while suffering from the debility which the medicine has induced, and do not confine himself to invalids diet, it would be better for him to have abstained from the use of it. The taking of solid food and a pursuit of active occupations after taking medicine, should be avoided. The best laxative for those not habitually accustomed to take any, is rheubarb with some aromatic. As three grains of rheubarb, with half a grain of Cayenne Pepper in a pill. The compound Syrup of Rheubarb, with Soda enough to correct any prevailing acidity, I consider the best laxative medicine for children.

I am your friend and Servant,

A. H. STEVENS.

New York July 6th. 1832.

These directions were prepared on the first inst. for a Friend about to leave the City, a further observation of the malignant Cholera as it has appeared here has led me to the following conclusions.

1. That although the malignant Cholera is dependant mainly upon a change in the atmosphere not cognizable to our senses and known only by its effects, termed meteoration by some physicians, and which unlike the malaria by which intermittent fevers are excited, extends over whole continents and does not emanate from any special local source, yet it is excited by local and sensible impurities of the air such as are offensive to our sense of smell and sickening to breathe ; and which are now existing in several sections of our city.

2. That the malignant Cholera attacks almost exclusively individuals affected with common Cholera, intoxication and Diarrhea and other derangement of the bowels, which are *rather to be considered as inviting the disease than as constituting its earlier stage.*

I have not witnessed any facts which lead me to think the malignant Cholera as it now prevails in the city to be personally contagious. I put forth these opinions as seeming to me probable and subject to change upon further observation. It may be said that they should have been withheld until they had acquired more certainty. To this I answer that the urgency of the occasion calls for the expression of the best opinions we are enabled to form and I have no personal pride

of opinion that would make me feel at all humbled if future facts should lead to opposite conclusions. The practical results of these opinions are—

1. That infected houses and infected districts should not be visited by those whose duty does not call them there.

2. The sick in situations, other than those where they contracted the disease, should not be objects of terror to their friends.

3. That the same means by which attacks of ordinary Cholera are prevented, offer the best prospect under divine providence for escaping this pestilence.